

# Success Story

SUCCESS STORY, May 2006

## DTSC's Schools Program Makes the Grade

In January 2000, Assembly Bill (AB) 387 and Senate Bill (SB) 162 took effect establishing the process for environmental assessment at new and expanding school sites when State funding is used. The legislation also named the Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) as the lead agency for evaluating those proposed school sites. DTSC's School Property Evaluation and Cleanup Division (Schools Program) has successfully supported the statewide effort to increase the number of schools and classrooms in California, while protecting children and staff from exposure to hazardous substances.

To date, DTSC's Schools Program has reviewed more than 1,700 school sites. Within the last six months the Schools Program has cleared 67 school sites, comprising 1,179 acres to accommodate nearly 54, 809 students in 2,188 classrooms.

DTSC's environmental overview process has helped motivate school districts to become more selective in evaluating potential school properties. At the same time, it has addressed concerns raised by parents, teachers, residents, and legislators about school properties that may be contaminated by giving them a more active role in selecting school properties. By developing a thorough and efficient process for evaluating school properties, DTSC's Schools Program has set the national standard for school site environmental reviews.

Pursuant to the Education Code, DTSC is mandated to complete its oversight under strict timeframes to accommodate the school districts' demanding construction schedules and associated permitting requirements. DTSC is required to review and approve Phase I Environmental Site Assessments and Preliminary Endangerment Assessments within 30 and 60 days of receipt, respectively.

Many school site investigations involve the evaluation of urban industrial areas, aka Brownfields. However, numerous rural and agricultural areas have also exhibited environmental contamination. DTSC is authorized to evaluate naturally-occurring hazards, such as petroleum deposits and naturally-occurring asbestos and substances not traditionally considered hazardous materials, such as methane from landfills, oil fields, and former dairy properties.

In an effort to streamline and standardize the investigation of school sites, the schools program has developed over 20 guidance documents, advisories and fact sheets. In addition, the Schools Program works closely with stakeholder groups, including the Coalition for Adequate School Housing (CASH) to respond to emerging issues. DTSC continues to refine its environmental assessment process for efficiency and to assist in the statewide effort to increase the number of environmentally safe schools in California.



State of  
California



Department of Toxic  
Substances Control

